



**Testimony
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Before the Public Safety & Security Committee
March 12, 2015**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) appreciates the opportunity to comment regarding **HB-6970 - AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY SERVICE PERSONNEL**, which will eliminate funding for Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) that serve a population of less than 40,000.

Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) are the facilities operated on a twenty-four hour basis to receive 9-1-1 calls and dispatch emergency response services or transferring or relaying 9-1-1 calls to other public safety agencies. The PSAP is the first point of reception of a 9-1-1 call.

COST supports efforts to *encourage* PSAPs to regionalize in ways that will reduce costs without undermining public safety response. However, we are concerned that the proposed legislation is premature inasmuch as it penalizes towns that fail to regionalize without assisting communities in addressing the various obstacles to regionalization.

State-Facilitated PSAP Consolidation

Many towns have implemented or are in the process of regionalizing PSAPs. For example, the communities of New London, Waterford and East Lyme are moving forward with efforts to create a regional emergency communications center. However, these towns are encountering complex issues in their attempt to consolidate under an interlocal agreement. Legislation was enacted last year to authorize the towns to establish a governing board, which helped address concerns regarding which town would be legally responsible for a majority of the costs. However, other issues have emerged that have thwarted efforts to regionalize the dispatch centers.

In other communities, towns have commissioned feasibility studies to consider potential cost savings and develop an implementation plans. Some towns have also faced barriers in their efforts to consolidate PSAPs, either due to existing labor agreements or because they lack guidance in how to proceed with consolidation. Still others have expended considerable effort and resources in trying to regionalize services without success.



As noted in a policy brief on PSAP consolidation by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, efforts to consolidate “can be hindered by upfront capital costs.” The report also concludes, “States can dramatically increase the pace and scope of consolidation by targeting PSAP funds to facilitate local mergers.”

Accordingly, COST urges lawmakers to consider ways of: 1) Assisting towns with undertaking feasibility studies to determine potential cost savings and identify barriers to consolidation; 2) Providing guidance to towns regarding how to address complex governing issues; and 3) Providing grants to communities to assist with upfront capital costs.

COST would be pleased to work with lawmakers and other municipal organizations to craft legislation to facilitate voluntary consolidations as part of a statewide strategy.